The inverse sovereignty effect: the impact of development partner practice on development policy sovereignty in Pacific Island Countries

Nicki Wrighton

PhD candidate, Victoria University of Wellington

The emergence of the Aid Effectiveness agenda in the latter part of the 20th century was a major shift in the development paradigm. A commitment to this agenda is visible at the policy level of all major development agencies working in the Pacific who aim to ensure their development practice is more effective for their Pacific partner governments. However, recent research shows a significant gap exists between the aid effectiveness policy ideals and the implementation of these ideals on the ground in the small Pacific nation of Tuvalu (Wrighton and Overton 2012, Overton et al 2012).

This PhD research explores the concept of ‘development policy sovereignty’. Case study investigation in three Pacific nations (Cook Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) asks how the current focus on policy and strategic engagement on the part of traditional donors and multilateral agencies impacts on the ability of these governments to manage their own development agenda. It seeks to identify markers of development policy sovereignty and asks how Pacific conceptions/definitions of development sovereignty might inform debates about aid effectiveness. It questions whether the aid effectiveness agenda, in contrast with its stated intention may, in fact, be undermining the development policy sovereignty of small Pacific nations. Finally this paper analyses how mobilising a Pacific nuanced view of development policy sovereignty might go some way towards closing the gap between the policy of aid effectiveness and its practice.

---

1 Wrighton N. & Overton J. (2012): Coping with participation in small island states: the case of aid in Tuvalu, Development in Practice, 22:2, 244-255